

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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Date Issued: May 23, 2012
Time: 10:00 a.m.

2012 NORTON SOUND HERRING FISHERY OUTLOOK

The 2012 projected herring biomass for the Norton Sound District is 52,949 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a guideline harvest of 10,590 tons. A maximum of 320 tons of herring are reserved to allow for the pound fishery to harvest a maximum of 90 tons of product (combined weight of herring roe and kelp). This leaves 10,270 tons for sac roe harvest. The beach seine harvest is allocated 10% of the sac roe projected harvest, or 1,027 tons. Herring ages 7-9 are expected to comprise 85% of the returning biomass, 36%, 31%, and 18%, respectively. Herring age-10 and older, 12%, and ages 5-6 (4%) are expected to comprise the remaining biomass.

Norton Sound Seafood Products is interested in buying approximately 800 tons of sac roe herring and another 100 tons of bait herring this season. Since 2006, the sac roe herring fishery has been opened by emergency order at the buyer's request and is generally left open continuously until late June. Historically, the Norton Sound commercial herring fishery has started from 9 to 41 days following the onset of the Togiak commercial herring fishery. Based on the May 14 start date of the 2012 Togiak herring fishery, the commercial herring fishery in Norton Sound is anticipated to open towards the end of the first week of June. Currently, there is extensive and thick shorefast ice from the southern tip of Cape Denbigh southwest to Stuart Island. For example, off St. Michael, it has been reported that the ice is 5 feet thick in places. A combination of easterly winds and favorable tides in southern Norton Sound from June 4-8 will hopefully help clear the majority of this ice and allow for a commercial fishery.

The department will begin flying biomass surveys in early June. If shorefast ice clears in time at Cape Denbigh, the department also intends to operate the Cape Denbigh test fishery project to monitor stock composition of the herring spawning biomass. If not, test fishery operations will be conducted based out of Unalakleet. The Unalakleet field office is now open for the season with limited personnel but will be fully staffed by the first week of June. If you have any questions regarding the commercial herring fishery, please call the ADF&G Nome Area office at 1-800-560-2271 or Unalakleet field office at 1-907-624-3921.

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